

Fraud Prevention Month ? Romance fraud continues to claim untold hearts and dollars

Losses due to romance and dating scams continue to mount, according to members of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Anti-Rackets Branch.

According to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (CAFC), in 2014 there were 1,467 complaints from Canada of romance fraud. Of those complaints, 998 victims were identified and their combined financial losses exceeded \$13.9 million, second only to wire fraud. The criminals seek potential victims online, generally single or recently unattached people. Usually, this form of mass marketing fraud occurs through singles and dating-related "meet" websites, social media platforms, or e-mail blasts. In some cases, prolonged interaction with individuals has cost some victims tens of thousands of dollars before the "relationship" ends, usually without ever meeting in person. Although 95 per cent of all types of fraud are not reported, romance scams cause victims severe financial hardship and personal embarrassment, which inhibits their decision to report the crime.

If you suspect you or someone you know has been a victim of romance fraud, or if you have already sent funds, don't be embarrassed ? You're not alone. Contact police or CrimeStoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS) or online at <https://www.tipsubmit.com/> Police have some tips to avoid being a victim of a romance or dating scam.

? Don't give out any personal information in an email or when you are chatting online. Educate yourself. Check the person's name, the company name and the addresses used.

? Ask yourself, "Would someone I have never met really declare their love for me after only a few letters or emails?" If the answer is no, report it to police.

? Never send money, or give personal credit card or online account details to anyone you do not know and trust. A request to send money to a foreign country to someone you have never personally met should be a red flag.

? Check website addresses carefully. Scammers often set up fake websites with addresses that are very similar to legitimate dating websites.

?Those who use social media and dating websites need to ensure their personal and financial security before committing money to someone online," Deputy OPP Commissioner Scott Tod commented. "Only give out your personal information when you have personally met and trust the person with whom you are interacting."

"Like any scam, use your computer and wireless devices to your advantage and educate yourself and others," added Detective Inspector Mike Bickerton, of the OPP Anti-Rackets Branch. "We encourage everyone to leverage their social media interactions by using #dontbeavictim #fraudprevention and #OPPtips to help others identify and report fraud."